

Where Are They Now

Messenger catches up with former leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada. In this issue we talk with Mike Lekic.

Interview by Sergena Obas, administrative secretary, Quebec Conference



Nada and Mike Lekic

Messenger: *Tell me where you were born and about your earlier years.*

Mike Lekic: I was born in Strpce, Kosovo, Serbia (former Yugoslavia). I was the first child in a family of four children. We were a Greek Orthodox Christian family until my father's friend went to work in Belgrade and told him that he had become a Seventh-day Adventist because they follow Jesus and the Bible.

Long story short, my father's friend put him in contact with an Adventist pastor, and after six months of Bible study my father became an Adventist and my mother followed soon after.

No one had heard of Adventists in our village. The whole town rose against us, calling us derogatory names such as "new faith believers" or "Sabbatarians," insulting us, falsely accusing us, and even refusing to sell to us.

Even though I was only seven years old, I learned to stand for my faith by not going to school on Sabbath (school went from Monday through Saturday). Although I was one of the best students, my father was fined multiple times for my absence on Saturdays, which was exceedingly difficult on the family since money was scarce.

M: *Where did you go to school?*

ML: After I completed basic education in my hometown, my father had a dream that he and I start a business as carpenters and metal lathe operators. As



our family's needs were growing, our farmland of 12.36 acres was not sufficient for our survival. So, after my baptism in 1965, my father sent me to Skopje, Macedonia (also former Yugoslavia) to pursue the metal lathe operator trade. However, God had other plans.

While in Skopje, I was very active in the church. One particular Sabbath in 1966, the conference president was visiting, and he encouraged me to go to our theological/pastoral training school in Rakovica, near Belgrade.

Later, my parents immigrated to Cleveland, Ohio, and I went to Newbold College in England, where I mainly studied English and took a few theology courses. In the meantime, I passed a GED/Ohio State High School equivalency test and transferred to Campus Adventiste du Salève, now Adventist University of France, where I completed my Diplôme d'Évangéliste in 1973.

Subsequently, I also earned a teaching certificate of French at Alliance Française in Paris in 1974, an MDiv in 1985, and an MA in educational and developmental psychology in 1987 at Andrews University; an MPH in international/global health from Loma Linda University, through Haiti's Extended Campus at Adventist University of Haiti in 1991; and a PhD in education at Andrews University in 2005, thanks to Canadian Union (now SDACC) sponsorship during several summers.

M: *What led you to choose, first, a ministerial and, later, an educational career? In what capacity have you served?*

ML: It all started by the simple prayer of a child. Like the prophet Amos, "I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd" during the school summer breaks, caring for our oxen and cows. While they were grazing, I would lie down and pray, "Please Lord, help me see what's beyond the mountain!" God heard my prayer and guided my life wonderfully, beyond the Sharr Mountains of Skopje, Macedonia, to many other places for my education and service—first in Europe, then around the world.

After my mandatory military service in the former Yugoslavia, I served as assistant/associate pastor in Bremerhaven, Germany. After two years in New York City and my studies at Andrews University, my family and I accepted a call as missionaries to the Adventist University of Haiti (1987–93) where I served in several departments and as president (1991–93).

In 1993, I began to serve as superintendent of education, youth, and church and Personal Ministries director at the Quebec Conference. During most of 1996, I served as the superintendent of education at the Ontario Conference. Later that year, I had the privilege

of serving as education director of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, which I did until 2006.

In February 2006, we returned to the United States as Education & Adventist Community Services superintendent of the New Jersey Conference. After a few years in the Philippines as director of education of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, I became the General Conference associate director of education and Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) executive secretary (Aug. 29, 2010–Dec. 31, 2020) before my blessed retirement on Jan. 1, 2021.

Over the years I was happy to see my younger colleagues and my students occupy important positions in God's church around the world. That has given me great satisfaction. Once a pastor, always a pastor. While in the Philippines, I held two major evangelistic campaigns and went back for five additional ones while at the General Conference. Hundreds have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and rejoice in the hope of His soon coming. My favourite Bible verse is: "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NLT).

M: *Tell us about your family.*

ML: My wife, Nada, and I have two children and five grandsons.

Our son, Tim, is a medical doctor with a specialization in neurology from Loma Linda University School of Medicine and a stroke specialty from Columbia University in New York City.

Our daughter, Tina, is a graduate of Andrews University School of Nursing and currently works at the University of California Irvine Medical Center's intensive care. Her husband, Marco Allard, is an associate professor of chemistry at La Sierra University. He is a Quebecer and gives us a good reason to visit Canada more often. ;-)

M: *Where are you now and what are you doing?*

ML: Nada and I have happily retired in Riverside, Calif., near our children and grandchildren who keep us busy, but we still find time to travel. We are active in our local church, and I also continue to volunteer with the Adventist Accrediting Association. I chaired two university evaluations in Tanzania and Rwanda in 2021, and two in India in 2022.

We have also been volunteering with Gospel Outreach International since October 2022 in response to the General Conference appeal to the retirees at the last General Conference Session to "find fulfilling ways to let our light shine in retirement." ■

